

FOREWORD

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INTERVIEW WITH FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE DEAN ACHESON
FOR THE JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY LIBRARY

Interviewer: Lucius D. Battle

Date of Interview: April 27, 1964

This is an interview with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson for the Kennedy Library -- this is Lucius D. Battle speaking; I was Assistant to Mr. Acheson during the time that he was Secretary of State.

Lucius D. Battle: Mr. Acheson, I thought we might begin today by reviewing the origins of your relationship with the late President Kennedy -- when did you first meet him?

Dean Acheson: This is hard for me to remember -- I can't recall any relations with Kennedy when he was in the House of Representatives, but I do know that we met in the 50's when he was in the Senate. I can't think of much of anything before say 1957 -- '58 -- somewhere along in there -- although I think our relations went back a little bit longer than that.

The first thing that stands out in my mind -- this is somewhat towards the beginning of our relationship -- had to do with the book I wrote which was called "Power and Diplomacy". I picked out as an example of how not to do something from a speech that Mr. Kennedy made in the Senate -- in '57. This was a speech about France and Algeria, and he said that the Senate should pass a resolution which he had drafted and which he read in his speech which said that France should immediately get to work with the Algerian rebels and work out an arrangement for independence. And if they had not done this by the following September when the United Nations was to meet, the United States would introduce a resolution in the U.N. in favor of Algeria. I said this seemed to me the wrong way to treat our oldest ally and our most sensitive ally -- a country which was still smarting under the defeats of World War II and a sense of inferiority for what had happened. I remember using the phrase "this impatient snapping of our fingers" -- /Congressional Record, July 2, 1957, p. 10788/

L.B.: I recall this now --

D.A.: -- seemed to be the wrong thing to do. Well, this book was published in '58, and I thought no more about that until one of the big blizzards we had about February or March of '58. I was coming down on the Congressional from New York -- the Congressional that didn't start. There was a great

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hope is to bring them home, you always got into the European mind an unsettling element. Surely we do hope to bring them home, but the point was to get the Europeans in such a state of confidence and growing capabilities that this time would come. It would never come if you keep saying, "if you don't do exactly what we want, we'll go home." This was the wrong way to act. I don't think he ever was quite with me on this. There's always a state of mind in the United States which looks at foreign policy as though we were rewarding good boys and being severe with bad boys. That doesn't make any sense. You can't conduct affairs like that. It isn't a matter of rewards and punishments. It's a question of trying to influence people to do what in a collective way is the desirable thing to do. Once you understand that the result of the whole civil war in Europe from 1914 to 1945, is that you have a divided world and that it will continue to be divided with two great power centers in it, one must conduct policy on that basis. This is what I was trying to get across. Well, after this paper was finished -- and what I was doing in it, really, was to underline very deeply the conception of strong Allied conventional power in Europe, looking more and more at usable power as applied to foreign affairs in Europe. Underneath the whole thing there must be the assurance that anybody who uses nuclear power is going to be so badly hurt that it isn't wise to do it. This does not dispose of the relevancy of power in foreign affairs. Now this does not mean that you have to use it to make it relevant. But it means that if you give up either nuclear or conventional power altogether, then the Russians will engage in policies which we can't meet. And this is disastrous. Now that's the conception that was in my paper.

When we got through with it, I was going to Europe to argue the jurisdictional part of the case in the World Court, and at about the time the President and the Secretary of State asked me if I would see General DeGaulle and Chancellor Adenauer and tell them what we were doing -- tell them that the President was not trying to face them with a decision which we had arrived at, but that in order to talk to them at all we had to make up our own minds what it was we thought would be sensible policy and explain it to them. And so this I did at his request -- and I'll come back to that, if you wish, later on. There's one thing that ought to be mentioned here. We went to Europe in March of '61 I think -- sometime in there. A day or so before I went I was over talking with the President about this NATO paper -- a lovely, first warm spring day, and he said, "I want to talk with you about something else -- come on out here in the garden and sit in the sun." So we sat on a bench, and he said, "do you know anything about this Cuba proposal." I said I didn't even know there was one. He outlined to me what the proposal was. I was very much alarmed about the thing, and said I hoped he wasn't serious about it. He said, "I don't know if I'm serious or not but this is the proposal and I've been thinking about it and it is serious -- in that sense, I've not made up my mind but I'm giving it very serious thought." I remember saying that I did not think it was necessary to call in Price, Waterhouse to discover that 1500 Cubans weren't as good as

25,000 Cubans. It seemed to me that this was a disastrous idea. We talked about it for a little bit and then I went off. I really dismissed it from my mind because it seemed like such a wild idea. While I was in Europe the Bay of Pigs came off and this really shattered the Europeans. It was such a completely unthought out, irresponsible thing to do. They had tremendously high expectations of the new administration, and when this thing happened they just fell miles down with a crash. This had an unfortunate effect on my personal relations with the President. As you may remember, when I came back I made a speech to the Foreign Service --

L.B.: I recall it very well, I sat next to you --

D.A.: And in it I was ill-advised enough to attempt to be humorous about something which I shouldn't have been humorous about. The European view, I said, was that they were watching a gifted young amateur practice with a boomerang, when they saw, to their horror, that he had knocked himself out. Well, the President didn't like this at all.

L.B.: I recall that he sent for the text of the speech. He got it together over here -- it had been taped -- and it went over to him at that particular time. And I heard also that he was rather irritated by this.

D.A.: He was very irritated.

L.B.: But your relations with him during this period -- in addition to the NATO paper -- were there conversations with him between the two of you other than in the NSC or the contacts considering the NATO paper, on other subjects or this one?

D.A.: I don't think so -- I don't remember any. I know one time when W. S. Lewis was staying with us, who is sort of an uncle-in-law of Jackie Kennedy, we went over and had tea with them, a pleasant time at the White House. But I think most of my relations with him were business relations on these subjects. We got into Berlin policy, and we also got into policy toward Portugal.

The latter happened purely by accident. I was riding over with Dean Rusk to the White House for a meeting of the NSC on the NATO paper. And he brought Woody Wallner along who had a draft telegram instructing our people to vote against Portugal or for the resolution for an investigation into the Angola matter. I argued against sending this telegram in the car when we were going over. Then Dean Rusk and Woody and the President went off in the corner of the Cabinet Room and talked about this. He signed the telegram and went out with it. Later on in the meeting something came up about treatment of our allies -- and I said that an illustration of what I thought was the wrong way to conduct an alliance was contained in the telegram which he had just signed. One cannot expect an alliance to hold together strongly when the leader of the alliance is taking actions which members of the alliance think are directly hostile to their interests.

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D.A.: No, I think I only talked with him about three or four times -- one in the spring, one in the fall -- perhaps twice.

L.B.: You started to mention something else about your trip to Europe. You said you would come back to this in a moment.

D.A.: Yes, this is my interview with these two men -- one with DeGaulle and one with Adenauer. The one with Adenauer on April 9, 1961, I think was quite important -- the one with DeGaulle on April 20th was interesting but nothing came of that. On April 21st I had a session with the NATO Council. The meeting with DeGaulle took about an hour, in which I explained to him our thoughts about NATO -- what we thought the relevancy of NATO and any military power of NATO was to questions of foreign policy in Europe -- and the importance of trying to get together with our allies on fundamental foreign policy conceptions, particularly about Central Europe, and then about what constituted pressure and what didn't constitute pressure on the Russians. He listened to all of this very courteously, as he did later on about Cuba. It was quite clear he didn't agree with this at all. He told me what he was doing about his own force de frappe. He was going ahead with that. I said, well I was not an ambassador -- I was not sent over to negotiate in any way at all. The President wanted General DeGaulle to be aware of what he, Mr. Kennedy, was doing in order to try and get his mind ready to talk with his allies. I said, "he isn't expecting to come over here later on with his mind completely made up. But if he comes over with a blank mind he isn't going to be any help to anybody. So he wants to be able to talk with you in a constructive way. The views I am giving you are my own. The President is now considering them and he has asked me to tell you about them." I thought that we at least put DeGaulle into a position where he could not say that nobody let him know anything until he was faced with it. I talked to the Council of NATO pretty much the same way.

Adenauer had wanted to see me very badly. It was arranged that a military plane would pick me up, fly me down to Bonn where the old gentleman would meet me and take me out to his own house on Sunday. This he did. A glorious spring day in the Rhine Valley -- all the fruit trees out -- everybody out on Sunday. I was scared to death. We just went about as fast as it was possible to go in an automobile with a jeep ahead of us with a soldier sitting up in the back with two paddles. He would put a paddle out, like this, which meant that we were going to go right up on the sidewalk, or, with the other hand, which meant we would go on the wrong side of the road -- The old man was just having a wonderful time.

L.B.: Not bothered at all --

D.A.: Not at all -- imperturbable. We got down to his house -- stopped in a little lane. There were a few people standing around who clapped when we got out of the car -- and there was this house, about 100 feet up the side

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vigorous and frank criticism. But I never said anything about this in public. I didn't write letters to the newspapers and didn't make speeches.

L.B.: I know you didn't -- but I'm only getting at your personal relationships in this period, sir. You mentioned the slight strain that had come about as a result of a speech you made to the Foreign Service Association. But I gather this was pretty well behind you and there was no difficulty during this period.

D.A.: Yes, yes.

L.B.: Well, shall we turn on to the next period -- we've done the Portuguese base discussion, which covered over part of this period. The Cuban crisis, I presume, was the next involvement that you had with the Administration -- this was October of '62.

D.A.: Yes -- the early part of '62 I was in the Far East and then in The Hague and was just out of Washington pretty nearly six months, so I didn't have much to do with anybody in the Government. In the autumn of that year in October, I was asked by the Secretary of Defense to come to his office. I should think that was probably on a Tuesday or Wednesday of the famous week. I think the troubles began on the 16th, and I should think that the 17th might have been the day that I came over. He then showed me the photographs of the missiles in Cuba which had been taken up to that time -- I think they had just been developed the day before. He said that these were nuclear weapons (we had discovered at that time only the shorter range of the two types of missiles) and asked me what I thought should be done.

I thought about it as much as one could in that time, and said it seemed to me we had to consider at the outset whether to deal with the weapons before they became operative, or whether we would take the risk that they would become operative while we were taking other steps to get them out of Cuba. I was very much afraid that if we delayed dealing with them we would get into a situation where we could never deal with them. In the first place, the danger of the situation would become very much accentuated if these weapons got into a firing state. We already had photographs of the surface-to-air missile stations which appeared to be operative -- at least no one was sure they weren't -- and if they became operative and the weather continued to clear it might be very difficult to do anything until these weapons were pointing at our hearts and ready to shoot. The other course was to go in on a low-level bombing expedition and take these out. The next day I was asked to come back and we had more photographs -- and this continued each day until, I think, Thursday or Friday, when a full, quite frightening picture was developed. This showed a very considerable number of weapons -- the range would cover almost the entire United States. I think

the only part of it which they would not cover would be the City of Seattle and I believe the President was unwilling of going to make a speech in Seattle. We advised cancelling that speech.

Well, various meetings were held during this period which have been publicized in more or less erroneous ways by various writers. And, of course, a whole range of views were taken. The basic matter of policy -- the great question to be decided here was which of the views which struck me from the very beginning as the issue one would take. The question was, which was more dangerous, to go in and knock these things out, in which case most of the people who would be killed would probably be Russians (they were not near centers of population) or to, as I said a moment ago, let them become operative and face a clamor of world opinion by which everybody might be paralyzed by talk while the Russian purpose was accomplished. Their purpose, it seemed to me to be, in the first place, was to increase greatly their nuclear bearing on us. For a time Secretary McNamara doubted whether in fact, they would have had much more bearing. It seemed to me that theoretically this might be true, but, in fact, short-range missiles located 90 miles from our coast were a much surer bet than long-range ones located about 5,000 miles from our coast. At any rate, their political effect would be terrific, both in Latin America and among our allies abroad. Therefore, something should be done quite quickly to counteract the terrible effect of these missiles if they were permitted to stay there.

In the discussion which followed, two things began to happen -- one was that the different views became closer together, and the other was that some people intervened to make the situations much more difficult by making rather foolish proposals. It has always been my impression that when you get soldiers talking the policy they want to go further and further in a military way so that all possibilities of doubt are removed, until their proposals are apt to be at least as dangerous as the original danger. They cannot satisfy themselves by doing something but not everything -- and therefore, as this discussion went on, more and more began to be introduced into the picture. For instance, it was pointed out that it would be a wise military step to take out the airfields in Cuba before mounting bombing expeditions. Surely this is what any good planner would do, but it would be a stupid thing to do because the airfields were all right near Havana or other cities -- you would have caused terrific casualties of Cubans which would be a very, very bad idea. Then other military people said, "Well, if you're going to do all that, why don't we put six divisions in and take over the Island." This could be done quite easily -- the obvious danger was, once you got in, how were you ever going to get out. So these were the problems.

In the course of these discussions, as I said, also the two sides began to get closer together. First of all, those who did not want to take immediate military action tended not to take any action. They soon left

that view and began to make suggestions closer to the policy which was finally adopted. In the course of this, the President asked me to see him and see him alone -- and I went to his office in the White House and he and I discussed this thing for about an hour. I gave him my view and told him all the dangers about it -- and pointed out the dangers in any other view -- and said that I was very glad that I was not in his position. He touched me very much toward the end of our talk. After I had said that he really bore a terrible burden, he got up and walked over to the French door looking out on the Rose Garden -- and stood there looking out for an appreciable length of time. Then he turned around and said to me, "I guess I better earn my salary this week." I said, "I'm afraid you have to." On, I should say it was, Saturday it was decided to divide the group that were talking. Those who thought some military action against the missiles was important should go into one place and devise what action should be recommended. Those who had other proposals would devise specific recommended action. The various proposals would then be put up to the President in fairly concrete form and he would decide. I went in with the people who were thinking of immediate air action.

After being in the room a little while, I decided that I didn't belong there at all. It was one thing to ask me to come over and give my opinion, but it was another thing for one not an officer of the United States engaged in planning of this importance and seriousness. So I asked to be excused, and said I would do anything that I could within a proper field, but this was not a proper thing to ask me to do. Security and other considerations were involved, and I just didn't like it. Not that I was disagreeing with anybody, but I just thought that it was not the right thing to do from the Government point of view. So I went out to the country. That evening, Saturday night, the Secretary of State telephoned me and said that the President had decided not to take the action which I had rather favored, but to do something rather less than this -- which he did not want to talk about over the telephone. The President was anxious for me to go to Europe and see General DeGaulle. I had given a memorandum either to the President or to the Secretary -- or at least I had a memorandum from which I spoke, I guess that was it -- and one of the points in it was, since we could not really consult our allies in advance, we ought to warn them as much in advance as possible, and this ought to be done in an impressive way -- I thought here was an occasion where the Vice President could be very usefully employed. At any rate, it would not do to have a charge d'affaires -- at this time there was no Ambassador to Paris -- walk into DeGaulle's office and tell him something like this. I little thought that the result was going to be that I would elect myself to this mission. But at any rate, Dean Rusk said to me that the President would like you to go the first thing in the morning. As I would come to the Department very early, they would instruct me and send me off. The important thing to know that night was whether I would go. I said that I remembered Justice Holmes saying to me that he all

belonged to a club which was the least exclusive in the world and the most expensive, and that was the United States of America. "Well, I guess if I belong to that club I better do what I'm asked to do." So I said, "Sure, I'll go." He said, "Well, you don't mind that your advice isn't being followed." And I said, "Of course not, I'm not the President, and I'll do whatever I can do."

So I came in in the morning quite early, and asked Barbara Evans, my secretary, to meet me at the State Department, and arrived with no bag, only the clothes I had on, no money and no passport. While I was being briefed, Barbara got the passport and had it fixed up. Some member of the Department passed a hat around the room and collected \$50 from various people to finance me, if I needed to be financed right away. When we got through, I went to the P Street house and packed a bag to last two or three days, and Barbara Evans met me with money and passport. Bill Bundy then picked me up, and in no time at all I was over the Atlantic.

The most serious things have entertaining sides. When we got in the air, we discovered that there were in all about six of us on this tremendous Air Force plane going across the ocean. Red Dowling, our Ambassador to Germany, who had been home on leave was there; Sherman Kent of the CIA was going with me to see DeGaulle with some photographs to show him; we had two other CIA men and three armed guards -- the two others were to go to London and Bonn with photographs and the armed guards were to guard everybody. Their first duty seemed to be to prevent the Air Force, which had taken the photographs, from seeing them. I thought this was security of a very fancy type. There was a VIP room in the plane -- but there had been apparently a hole, a fracture in the skin of the plane which produced a little high shrill scream that passed through the pressure way, in or out. This is just about what a dog could hear, but it was like a squeak of chalk on a blackboard. You just couldn't stand it. We went out and sat in the larger part of the plane with the armed guards standing around the table on which the four of us were looking at the photographs. Every time an Air Force officer went through the plane the guards covered the photographs, so he couldn't see them.

We touched down in a SAC base somewhere in the middle of England -- and there we were met by David Bruce. He said he had two interesting things he wanted to show me and they were both in his raincoat pocket. One obviously was hiding a bottle which he promptly produced, and we had some nourishment at the base. "The other one," he said, "put your hand in my pocket and see what's there." I put my hand in and it was a revolver. I said, "Why?", and he said, "I don't know." "I was told by the Department of State to carry this when I went to meet you." I said, "There was nothing said about shooting me, was there?" He said, "No, would you think it's a good idea?" We told him what was going on as he had to see Macmillan the next day and dropped off a CIA man and a guard and a set of the photographs. We then went on to Evreux, and there I was met by people at 2:30 in the morning French time, driving in to the charge d'affaires, Cecil Lyon, house, and went to bed for a few sleepless hours.

The next day the problem was, how we should approach DeGaulle. It was to me that the thing to do was to talk to his chief of cabinet and tell him that I had come into town incognito in the middle of the night on a very important secret mission from the President of the United States to President DeGaulle -- and I was at his disposal and would see him at any time that was convenient for him to see me. I thought this was a matter of such complete secrecy that it would be wise for no one even to know I was in town and, with that, we were in his hands. He said he thought this was a good way to deal with it -- and wanted me to come to the Elysees at 5 o'clock to see him. He would send his own staff cars for us so that no notice would be paid of their going in and out of the Elysee. These would not be big -- things that the ordinary staff people use bustling about, whereas the Ambassador's Cadillac would have attracted a good deal of attention. The middle of that day they brought in the American part of the SHAPE Command, and I was told to brief them about what was going on. And at 5 o'clock we then got in these cars and went to the Elysee, and, as the General had foreseen, no one paid the slightest attention to our driving in. We went not up to the front big steps in the courtyard of the Elysee but underground, and got off and out and followed some winding passages. As we went along the whole thing seemed to me to have an element of a Dumas novel, and I said to Sherman Kent, who was behind me, "Porthos is your rapier loose in its scabbard?", "I think some of the Cardinal's men may be lurking here." -- He said he was ready.

Well, we were taken up in an indirect way to the waiting room by General DeGaulle's office and set up in the cabinet room. There a friend of mine who had been in the French Embassy here, whose name was Label, told me he was going to be the interpreter and that the General would see me with Cecil Lyon and didn't want to see anybody else. He didn't want Sherman. I pointed out about the photographs and he said, no, he didn't want anybody except Cecil and me. So we went in -- I've rattled along in telling this story -- is this useful?

L.B.: Oh, it's fascinating, let's do this --

D.A.: -- because it has it's impressive side. We came in exactly as the clock behind the General's desk was striking five, which was a nice touch I thought. He rose from his desk and walked to the left-hand front corner of the desk where he waited. I went across the room and he held out his hand which I shook and then, in French, he said, "Your President has done me great honor by sending so distinguished an emissary." I thought this was a wonderful phrase because there is no possibly reply you can make to it -- all you can do is to bow. There's just nothing to say to that at all. With that he turned around and went back and sat at his desk -- motioned me to a chair, folded his hands and looked at me -- no talk about, I hope the President is well, did you have a nice flight -- nothing of this sort of all. I'd asked to see him, I had a message, let's get on with it. So I handed him a letter

from the President which he read and then I handed him the main part of the President's speech which had come over the wire to the Embassy and he looked through that. Both of these were in English which he seemed to have no trouble with at all. In fact, he had no trouble with English at all until we got in the technical part of my mission. He waived translation aside and, since he spoke very little himself in the early part of this, I didn't have too much trouble either. But it was all translated for me by Labell.

After reading these papers he started right off with very business-like and sound comment -- he questioned. He said, "In order to get our roles clear, do I understand that you have come from the President to inform me of some decision taken by your President -- or have you come to consult me about a decision which he should take." And I said, "We must be very clear about this. I have come to inform you of a decision which he has taken -- but I want to call your attention that it is the kind of a decision which opens the way for a lot of advice from his allies, which he wishes to have." I said, "You see that instead of taking a sharp action to begin with, which would really have put us right into the middle of something, he has taken action which will not materialize unless and until Russian ships attempt to violate the blockade. If they do, then an issue will be raised. If they don't, then no issue is raised."

He said, "That's very true," and then he said, "that was a wise step." Then something happened which I thought was impressive. After we had gone over the situation a little bit, I said, "I have outside the photographs of these missiles. They are extraordinary photographs and very impressive, and I think you may want to look at them." He waived this suggestion aside with a wave of his hand, and said, "Not now -- there will only be evidence -- a great nation like yours would not act if there were any doubt about the evidence, and, therefore, I accept what you tell me as a fact without any proof of any sort needed. Later on it would be interesting to see these, and I will see them -- but let's get the significance of the situation before we look at the details of it." This was so directly the opposite of Macmillan's attitude as I learned later, who said, "We won't publish these right away -- we must get chest in the paper -- no one will believe this unless they see these." General DeLoach didn't care whether anyone believed it or not -- he did, this was enough for him.

Then he said to me, "Do you think the Russians will attempt to force this blockade?" And I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Do you think that they would have reacted if your President had taken even stronger action?" And I said, "No, I do not think they would have done that." And he said, "I don't either." "If they should react, where would you think they would react?" And I said, "There are two obvious places -- one is, if we blockade Cuba they can blockade Berlin. This is a good reciprocal kind of attitude -- or they might take some action in regard to Turkey or a place where it would be difficult for us to respond." And he said, "But you don't think they will do either?" And I said, "No, I don't." He agreed with that. Now he said,

"Suppose they don't do anything -- suppose they don't try to break the blockade -- suppose they don't take the missiles out -- what will your President do then?" When I left Washington nobody had told me the answer to that question. I don't know whether a plan existed, but if it did, I didn't know it. But I thought it would be most unwise to indicate to General DeGaulle that we were not absolutely clear as to what we were going to do in each stage of this -- and I said, "We will immediately tighten this blockade and the next thing we would do is to stop tankers -- and this will bring Cuba to a standstill in no time at all." He said, "that's very good" again. I said, "If we have to go further why, of course, we'll go further." He said, "I understand."

We discussed this a little bit more, and then he said he would like to look at the photographs. I got Sherman Kent and a man he had who was an expert on these things with him -- and we laid them out on the desk. They were great big photographs blown up, large size, and the General has bad eyesight, but even with his bad eyesight these were striking. We took a magnifying glass, and then we showed him and counted the weapons. We had other photographs of the same weapons in a May Day parade, and we showed him every detail of these missiles and every detail of the ones in the May Day parade. He was obviously deeply impressed, said, "From what height were these taken?"; I said, "65,000 feet." He started to say, "We don't have anything" -- and then he caught himself and said, "Well, I'm not very familiar with photography but this seems remarkable to me." And they were remarkable. He was delighted with them. You could see the soldier really taking over at this point, as he studied everyone of them. The IL-28's which were first photographed on the deck of a ship from mast height; then, the same crates with the same markings on them were seen on an airfield. One of these had been broken open and here was an IL-28 with one wing on -- the other one hadn't been put on yet -- but the photograph of that and a photograph of an IL-28 were put side by side. They were 500-mile range atomic jet bombers. This really finished any doubt he had about the seriousness of this matter. When we got through with this he said, "You may tell your President that France will support him in every way in this crisis." He didn't say I will -- or the French Government will -- or anything. He was France.

L.B.: He makes no distinction.

J.A.: No distinction at all -- France will support him. He said, of course, "I shall write him about this, but you will doubtless be sending him a message and you may say that for me." I thanked him very much. We had some more talk, very brief, and then I looked up at the clock and it was exactly six. And I thought, well, you know, I think I'll make a bit by terminating this thing myself. He had received me -- I had done everything I was asked to do -- He's given me the message -- why fool around wasting his time -- so I arose and he was rather pleased that somebody would go out without being thrown out,

and he walked to the door with me. As he got to the door, he spoke the only words of English he spoke in the whole thing, and he said, "It would be a pleasure to me if these things were all done through you."

L.B.: A great compliment, isn't it?

D.A.: A great compliment -- you know, this was Louis XIV. saying a nice word to an ambassador from the Sultan of Turkey. And I went out.

L.B.: Did you leave Paris without having your own presence there noticed?

D.A.: No, my presence was noticed --

L.B.: I would have thought so.

D.A.: -- just about the time the President was to speak in Washington. This was, I believe, seven o'clock here -- that would have been 12 o'clock in Paris. About then the NATO Council was meeting, and I asked if I could come to the meeting -- I didn't tell them why. So a little bit before 12 they finished their meeting and I went in and told them what was going on so that by the time they left the meeting the President's speech was on the wires and they thought that was safe enough. While I was instructed to do by the President. When I came out, there were the newspapermen -- one a New York Times reporter and somebody else scanning the side. "For heavens sake, how did you get here and what are you up to?" "Oh," I said, "I had been here for a little while and I came over and just again telling my old friends in NATO some things that are going on." He said, "We're told to stand by -- that something hot is coming out of Washington." I said, "You're not misinformed." Then I left -- I didn't tell them anymore.

L.B.: On your return, did you see the President?

D.A.: Yes, I thought I was going right back, but I didn't. I got a telegram asking me to go on and see the Chancellor. Red Dowling had talked to him the night before and he seemed to be pretty excited about this whole thing, and that maybe it would be a good idea for me to take another day or so and see him. So I did this -- flew on and saw Strauss and some of the other members of the cabinet -- and then saw the Chancellor -- so then we went ahead and went over the whole thing again. This was very useful because he hadn't really given this much thought -- and we discussed the possibilities and how to develop, and I told him I thought it would end up by the Russians backing away -- just how, I don't know. Then when I came back I did see the President and reported to him about all of this -- I had a long talk with him, a long talk with Dean Rusk. I got home in time to take part in the discussions at the end as to whether we should or shouldn't accept this rather doubtful proposal of Khrushchev's.

I have two letters of the President's -- two letters to him. The first one, I wrote him on October 28, 1962, a handwritten letter and said:

"Dear Mr. President:

"With proper precautions for warding off the ill-luck which is said to attend upon and punish premature statement, may I congratulate you on your leadership, firmness and judgment over the past touchy week. We have not had these qualities at the helm in this country at all times. It is good to have them again.

"Only a few people know better than I how hard these decisions are to make, and how broad the gap is between the advisers and the decider. It may be that we are not out of the woods yet. I remember the fate of our high hopes as the Korean armistice was agreed to. But through the dangers of the flypaper of talk too clear, what has already happened amply shows the wisdom of the course you chose -- and stuck to. I am happy that you enabled me to participate in the events of the last week.

"Most respectfully,

Dean Acheson."

The President replied in longhand:

The White House
Washington

October 29th

"Dear Mr. Acheson:

"My thanks for your generous letter and for your service in the past days.

"It is a comforting feeling to have a distinguished captain of other battles in other years available for present duty.

"Sincerely,

/s/ John Kennedy"

Then the President sent me one of those paperweight mementos that he had with his initials and mine in October with the 16th to the 26th brought out in deeper letters. I wrote him on the 30th of November and said:

"How kind and imaginative of you to have designed and to have made me a recipient of such a delightful memento of those stirring and critical days in October. I am deeply grateful for it, and grateful, too -- as I wrote you earlier -- for the opportunity you opened to me to take part in the campaign so wisely conceived and vigorously executed. In its execution you confounded de Tocqueville's opinion that a democracy 'cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequence with patience.'

"Most respectfully yours,

Dean Acheson"

L.E.: Fascinating story -- well, were there any other conversations on Cuba at that point with the President?

D.A.: No, I think that is it.

L.E.: We move then to the other area in which you were involved in February of '63 -- that is the construction of the balance of payments. I know less about this particular one than any of the others, and in fact, was not aware that you had been involved in this particular problem. Would you care to talk about the origins of it, Sir, and your involvement in it?

D.A.: Yes, Yes, this was a considerable surprise to me that came out of a clear blue sky. Mac Bundy asked me to come over and see the President. So I went over, and he told me that he was unhappy about this whole balance of payments question. The Government seemed to be at loggerheads about it. My discussion of this thing resolved itself into such curious terms and such complicated issues that a layman was puzzled as to what it was all about. We had respect for people who had diametrically opposite views, and the language that they used seemed very confusing to him. He was turning to me as somebody -- he said he knew I had been in the Treasury. I said this was no recommendation. But he said what he really wanted me to do was to go into this as much of a layman as he would be -- he was impressed by the fact that I could bring simplicity out of apparent complications and confusion -- and see whether these people really were far apart; what was driving them far apart, if they were; -- and find out what was going on: try to bring them together and try to make a recommendation to him as to what to do. So I said that I would do it. It took about two weeks to do it.

TRANSCRIBED PAGES FOLLOW

(Page Four)

25,000 Cubans. It seemed to me that this was a disastrous idea. We talked about it for a little bit and then I went off. I really dismissed it from my mind because it seemed like such a wild idea. While I was in Europe the Bay of Pigs came off and this really shattered the Europeans. It was such a completely unthought out, irresponsible thing to do. They had tremendously high expectations of the new administration, and when this thing happened they just fell miles down with a crash. As you may remember, when I came back I made a speech to the Foreign Service --

L.B.: I recall it very well, I sat next to you --

D.A.: And in it I was ill-advised enough to attempt to be humorous about something which I shouldn't have been humorous about. The European view, I said, was that they were watching a gifted young amateur practice with a boomerang, when they saw, to their horror, that he had knocked himself out. Well, the President didn't like this at all.

L.B.: I recall that he sent for the text of the speech. We got it together over here -- it had been taped -- and it went over to him at that particular time. And I heard also that he was rather irritated by this.

D.A.: He was very irritated.

L.B.: But your relations with him during this period -- in addition to the NATO paper -- were there conversations with him between the two of you other than in the NSC or the contacts considering the NATO paper, on other subjects or this one?

D.A.: I don't think so -- I don't remember any. I know one time when W.S. Lewis was staying with us, who is sort of an uncle-in-law of Jackie Kennedy, we went over and had tea with them, a pleasant time at the White House. But I think most of my relations with him were business relations on these subjects. We got into Berlin policy, and we also got into policy toward Portugal.

The latter happened purely by accident. I was riding over with Dean Rusk to the White House for a meeting of the NSC on the NATO paper. And he brought Woody Wallner along who had a draft telegram instructing our people to vote against Portugal or for the resolution for an investigation into the Angola matter. I argued against sending this telegram in the car when we were going over. Then Dean Rusk and Woody and the President went off in the corner of the Cabinet Room and talked about this. He signed the telegram and went out with it. Later on in the meeting something came up about treatment of our allies -- and I said that an illustration of what I thought was the wrong way to conduct an alliance was contained in the telegram which he had just signed. One cannot expect an alliance to hold together strongly when the leader of the alliance is taking actions which members of the alliance think are directly hostile to their interests.

L.B.: No, I think I only talked with him about three or four times -- one in the spring, one in the fall, perhaps twice.

D.A.: You started to mention something else about your trip to Europe. You said you would come back to this in a moment.

L.B.: Yes, this is my interview with these men -- one with DeGaulle and one with Adenauer. The one with Adenauer on April 9, 1961, I think was quite important -- the one with DeGaulle on April 20th was interesting but nothing came of that. On April 21st I had a session with the NATO Council. The meeting with DeGaulle took about an hour, in which I explained to him our thoughts about NATO -- what we thought the relevancy of NATO and any military power of NATO was to questions of foreign policy in Europe -- and the importance of trying to get together with our allies on fundamental foreign policy conceptions, particularly about Central Europe, and then about what constituted pressure and what didn't constitute pressure on the Russians. He listened to all of this very courteously, as he did later on Cuba. It was quite clear he didn't agree with this at all. He told me what he was doing about his own force de frappe. He was going ahead with that. I said, well I was not an ambassador -- I was not sent over to negotiate in any way at all. The President wanted General DeGaulle to be aware of what he, Mr. Kennedy, was doing in order to try and get his mind ready to talk with his allies. I said, "he isn't expecting to come over here later on with his mind completely made up. But if he comes over with a blank mind he isn't going to be any help to anybody. So he wants to be able to talk with you in a constructive way. The views I am giving you are my own. The President is now considering them and he has asked me to tell you about them." I thought that we at least put DeGaulle into a position where he could not say the nobody let him know anything until he was faced with it. I talked to the Council of NATO pretty much the same way.

Adenauer wanted to see me very badly. It was arranged that a military plane would pick me up, fly me down to Bonn where the old gentleman would meet me and take me out to his own house on Sunday. This he did. A glorious spring day in the Rhine Valley -- all the fruit trees out -- everybody out on Sunday. I was scared to death. We just went about as fast as it was possible to go in an automobile with a jeep ahead of us with a soldier sitting up in the bank with two paddles. He would put a paddle out, like this, which meant that we were going to go right up on the sidewalk, or, with the other hand, which meant we would go on the wrong side of the road -- The old man was having a wonderful time.

L.B.: Not bothered at all --

D.A.: Not at all -- imperturbable. We got down to his house -- stopped in a little lane. There were a few people standing around who clapped when we got out of the car -- and there was this house, about 100 feet up the side

vigorous and frank criticism. But I never said anything about this in public. I didn't write letters to the newspapers and didn't make speeches.

L.B.: I know you didn't -- but I'm only getting at your personal relationships in this period, sir. You mentioned the slight strain that had come about as a result of a speech you made to the Foreign Service Association. But I gather this was pretty well behind you and there was no difficulty during this period.

D.A.: Yes, Yes.

L.B.: Well, shall we turn on to the next one, sir -- we've done the Portuguese base discussion, which covered part of this period. The Cuban crisis, I presume, was the next involvement that you had with the Administration -- this was October of '62.

D.A.: Yes, the early part of '62 was in the Far East and then in The Hague and was just out of Washington pretty nearly six months, so I didn't have much to do with anybody in the government. In the autumn of that year in October, I was asked by the Secretary of State to come to his office. I should think that was probably on a Tuesday or Wednesday of the famous week. I think the troubles began on the 16th, and I should think that the 17th might have been the day that I came over. He then showed me the photographs of the missiles in Cuba which had been taken up to that time -- I think they had just been developed the day before. He said that these were nuclear weapons (we had discovered at that time only the shorter range of the two types of missiles) and asked me what I thought should be done.

I thought about it as much as one could in that time, and said it seemed to me we had to consider at the outset whether to deal with the weapons before they became operative, or whether we should take the risk that they would become operative while we were taking other steps to get them out of Cuba. I was very much afraid that if we delayed dealing with them we would get into a situation where we could never deal with them. In the first place, the danger of the situation would become very much accentuated if these weapons got into a firing state. We already had photographs of the surface-to-air stations which appeared to be operative -- at least no one was sure they weren't -- and if they became operative and the weather continued to clear it might be very difficult to do anything until these weapons were pointing at our hearts and ready to shoot. The other course was to go in on a low-level bombing expedition and take those out. The next day I was asked to come back and we had more photographs -- and this continued each day until, I think, Thursday or Friday, when a full, quite frightening picture was developed. This showed a very considerable number of weapons -- the range would cover almost the entire United States. I think

the only part of it which they could not cover would be the City of Seattle - and I believe the President was thinking of going to make a speech in Seattle. We advised cancelling that speech.

Well, various meetings were held during this period which have been publicized in more or less erroneous ways by various writers. And, of course, a whole range of views were taken. The basic matter of policy -- the great question to be decided here was which of the views which struck me from the very beginning as the issue one would take. The question was, which was more dangerous, to go in and knock these things out, in which case most of the people who would be killed would probably be Russians (they were not near centers of population) or to, as I said a moment ago, let them become operative and face a clamor of world opinion by which everybody might be paralyzed by talk while the Russian purpose was accomplished. Their purpose, it seemed to me to be, in the first place, was to increase greatly their nuclear bearing on us. For a time Secretary McNamara doubted whether in fact, they would have much more bearing. It seemed to me that theoretically this might be true, but, in fact, short-range missiles located 90 miles from our coast were a much surer bet than long-range ones located about 5,000 miles from our coast. At any rate, their political effect would be terrific, both in Latin America and among our allies abroad. Therefore, something should be done quite quickly to counteract the terrible effect of these missiles if they were permitted to stay there.

In the discussions which followed, two things began to happen -- one was that the different views became closer together, and the other was that some people intervened to make the situations much more difficult by making rather foolish proposals. It has always been my impression that when you get soldiers talking about policy that they want to go further and further in a military way so that all possibilities of doubt are removed, until their proposals are apt to be at least as dangerous as the original danger. They cannot satisfy themselves by doing something but not everything -- and therefore, as this discussion went on, more and more began to be introduced into the picture. For instance, it was pointed out that it would be a wise military step to take out the airfields in Cuba before mounting bombing expeditions. Surely this is what any good planner would do, but it would be a stupid thing to do because the airfields were all right near Havana or other cities -- you would have caused terrific casualties of Cubans which would be a very, very bad idea. Then other military people said, "well, if you're going to do all that, why don't we put six divisions in and take over the Island." This could be done quite easily -- the obvious danger was, once you got in, how were you ever going to get out. So these were the problems.

In the course of these discussions, as I said, also the two sides began to get closer together. First of all, those who did not want to take immediate military action tended not to take any action. They soon left

that view and began to make suggestions closer to the policy which was finally adopted. In the course of this, the President asked me to come and see him alone -- and I went to his office in the White House and he and I discussed this thing for about an hour. I gave him my view and told him all the dangers about it -- and pointed out the dangers in any other view -- and said that I was very glad that I was not in his position. He touched me very much toward the end of our talk. After I had said that he really bore a terrible burden, he got up and walked over to the French door looking out on the Rose Garden -- and stood there looking out for an appreciable length of time. Then he turned around and said to me, "I guess I better earn my salary this week." I said, "I'm afraid you have to." On, I should say it was, Saturday it was decided to divide the group that were talking. Those who thought some military action against the missiles was important should go into one place and devise what action should be recommended. Those who had other proposals would devise specific recommended action. The various proposals would then be put up to the President in fairly concrete form and he would decide. I went in with the people who were thinking of immediate air action.

After being in the room a little while, I decided that I didn't belong there at all. It was one thing to ask me to come over and give my opinion, but it was another thing for one not an officer of the United States engaged in planning of this importance and seriousness. So I asked to be excused, and said I would do anything I could within a proper field, but this was not a proper thing to ask me to do. Security and other considerations were involved, and I just didn't like it. Not that I was disagreeing with anybody, but I just thought that it was not the right thing to do from the Government point of view. So I went out to the country. That evening, Saturday night, the Secretary of State telephoned me and said that the President had decided not to take the action which I had rather favored, but to do something rather less than this -- which he did not want to talk about over the telephone. The President was anxious for me to go to Europe and see General DeGaulle. I had given a memorandum either to the President or to the Secretary -- or at least I had a memorandum from which I spoke, I guess that was it -- and one of the points in it was, since we could not really consult our allies in advance, we ought to warn them as much in advance as possible, and this ought to be done in an impressive way -- I thought here was an occasion where the Vice President could be very usefully employed. At any rate, it would not do to have a charge d'affaires -- and tell him something like this. I little thought that the result was going to be that I would elect myself to this mission. But, at any rate, Dean Rusk said to me that the President would like you to go the first thing in the morning. If I would come to the Department very early, they would instruct me and send me off. The important thing to know that night was whether I would go. I said that I remembered Justice Holmes saying to me that we all

belonged to a club which was the least exclusive in the world and the most expensive, and that was the United States of America. I said, "I guess if I belong to that club I better do what I'm asked to do." So I said, "Sure, I'll go." He said, "Well, you don't mind that your advice isn't being followed." And I said, "Of course not, I'm not the President, and I'll do whatever I can do."

So I came in in the morning quite early, and asked Barbara Evans, my secretary, to meet me at the State Department, and arrived with no bag, only the clothes I had on, no money and no passport. While I was being briefed, Barbara got the passport and had it fixed up. Some member of the Department passed a hat around the room and collected \$50 from various people to finance me, if I needed to be financed right away. When we got through, I went to the P Street house and packed a bag to last two or three days, and Barbara Evans met me with money and passport. Bill Bundy then picked me up, and in no time at all I was over the Atlantic.

The most serious things have entertaining sides. When we got in the air, we discovered that there were in all about six of us on this tremendous Air Force plane going across the ocean. Red Dowling, our Ambassador to Germany, who had been home on leave was there; Sherman Kent of the CIA was going with me to see DeGaulle with some photographs to show him; we had two other CIA men and three armed guards -- the two others were to go to London and Bonn with photographs and the armed guards were to guard everybody. Their first duty seemed to be to prevent the Air Force, which had taken the photographs, from seeing them. I thought this was security of a very fancy type. There was a VIP room in the plane -- but there had been apparently a hole, a fracture in the skin of the plane which produced a little high shrill scream that passed through the pressure way, in or out. This is just about what a dog would hear, but it was like a squeak of chalk on a blackboard. You just couldn't stand it. We went out and sat in the larger part of the plane with the armed guards standing around a table on which the four of us were looking at the photographs. Every time an Air Force officer went through the plane the guards covered the photographs, so he couldn't see them.

We touched down in a SAC base somewhere in the middle of England -- and there we were met by David Bruce. He said he had two interesting things he wanted to show me and they were both in his raincoat pocket. One obviously was hiding a bottle which he promptly produced, and we had some nourishment at the base. "The other one," he said, "put your hand in my pocket and see what's there." I put my hand in and it was a revolver. I said, "Why?", and he said, "I don't know." "I was told by the Department of State to carry this when I went to meet you." I said, "There was nothing said about shooting me, was there?" He said, "No, would you think it's a good idea?" We told him what was going on as he had to see Macmillan the next day and dropped off a CIA man and a guard and a set of the photographs. We then went on to Evreux, and there I was met by people at 2:30 in the morning French time, driving in to the charge d'affaires, Cecil Lyon, house, and went to bed for a few sleepless hours.

The next day the problem was, how we should approach DeGaulle. It seemed to me that the thing to do was to talk to his chef de cabinet and tell him that I had come into town incognito in the middle of the night on a very important secret mission from the President of the United States to President DeGaulle -- and I was at his disposal and would see him at any time that was convenient for him to see me. I thought this was a matter of such complete secrecy that it would be wise for no one even to know I was in town and, with that, we were in his hands. He said he thought this was a good way to deal with it -- and wanted me to come to the Elysee at 5 o'clock to see him. He would send his own staff cars for us so that no notice would be paid of their going in and out of the Elysee. These would not be big -- things that the ordinary staff people use bustling about, whereas the Ambassador's Cadillac would have attracted a good deal of attention. The middle of that day they brought in the American part of the SHAPE Command, and I was told to brief them about what was going on. And at 5 o'clock we then got in these cars and went to the Elysee, and, as the General had foreseen, no one paid the slightest attention to our driving in. We went not up to the front big steps in the courtyard of the Elysee but underground, and got off and out and followed some winding passages. As we went along the whole thing seemed to me to have an element of a Dumas novel, and I said to Sherman Kent, who was behind me, "Porthos is your rapier loose in its scabbard?", "I think some of the Cardinal's men may be lurking here." - He said he was ready.

Well, we were taken up in an indirect way to the waiting room by General DeGaulle's office and set up in the cabinet room. There a friend of mine who had been in the French Embassy here, whose name was Labell, told me he was going to be the interpreter and that the General would see me with Cecil Lyon and didn't want to see anyone else. He didn't want Sherman. I pointed out about the photographs and he said, no, he didn't want anybody except Cecil and me. So we went in -- I've rattled along in telling this story -- is this useful?

L.B.: Oh, it's fascinating, let's do this --

D.A.: because it has its impressive side. We came in exactly as the clock behind the General's desk was striking five, which was a nice touch I thought. He rose from his desk and walked to the left-hand front corner of the desk where he waited. I went across the room and he held out his hand which I shook and then, in French, he said, "Your President has done me great honor by sending so distinguished an emissary." I thought this was a wonderful phrase because there is no possible reply you can make to it -- all you can do is bow. There's just nothing to say to that at all. With that he turned around and went back at sat at his desk -- motioned me to a chair, folded his hands and looked at me -- no talk about, I hope the President is well, did you have a nice flight -- nothing of this sort at all. I'd asked to see him, I had a message, let's get on with it. So I handed him a letter

from the President which he read and then I handed him the main part of the President's speech which had come over the wire to the Embassy, and he looked through that. Both of these were in English which he seemed to have no trouble with at all. In fact, he had no trouble with English at all until we got in the essential part of my mission. He waived translation aside and, since he spoke very little himself in the early part of this, I didn't have too much trouble either. But it was all translated for me by Labell.

After reading these papers he started right off with very business-like and sound comment -- he questioned. He said, "In order to get our roles clear, do I understand that you have come from the President to inform me of some decision taken by your President -- or have you come to consult me about a decision which he should take?" And I said, "We must be very clear about this. I have come to inform you of a decision which he has taken -- but I want to call your attention that it is the kind of a decision which opens the way for a lot of advice from his allies, which he wishes to have." I said, "You see that instead of taking a sharp action to begin with, which would really have put us right into the middle of something, he has taken action which will not materialize unless and until Russian ships attempt to violate the blockade. If they do, then an issue will be raised. If they don't then no issue is raised."

He said, "That's very true," and then he said, "that was a wise step." Then something happened which I thought was impressive. After we had gone over the situation a little bit, I said, "I have outside the photographs of these missiles. They are extraordinary photographs and very impressive, and I think you may want to look at them." He waived this suggestion aside with a wave of his hand, and said, "not now -- these will only be evidence -- a great nation like yours would not act if there were any doubt about the evidence, and therefore, I accept what you tell me as a fact without any proof of any sort needed. Later on it would be interesting to see these, and I will see them -- but let's get the significance of the situation before we look at the details of it." This was so directly the opposite of Macmillan's attitude as I learned later, who said, "We must publish these right away -- we must get these in the paper -- no one will believe this unless they see these." General DeGaulle didn't care whether anyone believed it or not -- he did, this was enough for him.

Then he said to me, "Do you think the Russians will attempt to force this blockade?" And I said, "No, I do not." He said, "Do you think that they would have reacted if your President had taken even sharper action?" And I said, "No, I do not think they would have done that." And he said, "I don't either." "If they should react, where would you think they would react?" And I said, "There are two obvious places -- one is, if we blockade Cuba they can blockade Berlin. This is a good reciprocal kind of attitude -- or they might take some action in regard to Turkey or a place where it would be difficult for us to respond." And he said, "But you don't think they will do either?" And I said, "No, I don't." He agreed with that. Now he said,

Suppose they don't do anything -- suppose they don't try to break the blockade -- suppose they don't take the missiles out -- what will your President do then?" When I left Washington nobody had told me the answer to that question. I don't know whether a plan existed, but if it did, I didn't know it. But I thought it would be most unwise to indicate to General DeGaulle that we were not absolutely clear as to what we were going to do in each stage of this -- and I said, "We will immediately tighten this blockade and the next thing we would do is to stop tankers -- and this will bring Cuba to a standstill in no time at all." He said, "that's very good" again. I said, "If we have to go further why, of course, we'll go further." He said, "I understand."

We discussed this a little but more, and then he said he would like to look at the photographs. I got Sherman Kent and a man he had who was an expert on these things with him -- and we laid them out on the desk. They were great big photographs blown up, large size, and the General has bad eyesight, but even with his bad eyesight these were striking. We took a magnifying glass, and then we showed him and counted the weapons. We had other photographs of the same weapons in a May Day parade, and we showed him every detail of these missiles and every detail of the ones in the May Day parade. He was obviously deeply impressed, said, "From what height were these taken?"; I said, "65,000 feet." He started to say, "We don't have anything" -- and then he caught himself and said, "Well, I'm not very familiar with photography but this seems remarkable to me." And they were remarkable. He was delighted with them. You could see the soldier really taking over at this point, as he studied everyone of them. The IL-28's which were first photographed on the deck of a ship from mast height; then, the same crates with the same markings on them were seen on an airfield. One of these had been broken open and here was an IL-28 with one wing on -- the other one hadn't been put on yet -- but the photograph of that and a photograph of an IL-28 were put side by side. They were 500-mile range atomic jet bombers. This really finished any doubt he had about the seriousness of this matter. When we got through with this he said, "You may tell your President that France will support him in every way in this crisis." He didn't say I will -- of the French Government will -- or anything. He was France.

L.B.: He makes no distinction.

D.A.: No distinction at all -- France will support him. He said, of course, "I shall write him about this, but you will doubtless be sending him a message and you may say that for me." I thanked him very much. We had some more talk, very brief, and then I looked up at the clock and it was exactly six. And I thought, well you know, I think I'll make a hit by terminating this thing myself. He had received me -- I had done everything I was asked to do -- He's given me the message -- why fool around wasting his time -- so I arose and he was rather pleased that somebody would go out without being thrown out,

and he walked to the door with me. As he got to the door, he spoke the only words of English he spoke in the whole thing, and he said, "It would be a pleasure to me if these things were all done through you."

L.B.: A great compliment, isn't it?

D.A.: A great compliment -- you know, this was Louis XIV saying a nice word to an ambassador from the Sultan of Turkey. And I went out.

L.B.: Did you leave Paris without having your own presence there noticed?

D.A.: No, my presence was noticed --

L.B.: I would have thought so.

D.A.: -- just about the time the President was to speak in Washington. This was, I believe, seven o'clock here -- that would have been 12 o'clock in Paris. About then the NATO Council was meeting, and I asked if I could come to the meeting -- I didn't tell them why. So a little bit before 12 they finished their meeting and I went in and told them what was going on so that by the time they left the meeting the President's speech was on the wires and they thought that was safe enough. This I was instructed to do by the Department. When I came out, there were two newspapermen -- one a New York Times reporter and somebody else standing outside. "For heaven's sake, how did you get here and what are you up to?" "Oh," I said, "I had been here for a little while and I came over and just again telling my old friends in NATO some things that are going on." He said, "We're told to stand by -- that something hot is coming out of Washington." I said, "You're not misinformed." Then I left -- I didn't tell anymore.

L.B.: On your return, did you see the President?

D.A.: Yes, I thought I was going right back, but I didn't. I got a telegram asking me to go on to see the Chancellor. Red Dowling had talked to him the night before and he seemed to be pretty excited about this whole thing, and that maybe it would be a good idea for me to take another day or so and see him. So I did this -- flew on and saw Strauss and some of the other members of the Cabinet -- and then saw the Chancellor -- so then we went ahead and went over the whole thing again. This was very useful because he hadn't really given this much thought -- and we discussed the possibilities and how it might develop, and I told him I thought it would end up by the Russians backing away -- just how, I don't know. Then when I came back I did see the President and reported to him about all of this -- I had a long talk with him, a long talk with Dean Rusk. I got home in time to take part in the discussions at the end as to whether we should or shouldn't accept this rather doubtful proposal of Khrushchev's.

I have two letters of the President's -- two letters to him. The first one, I wrote him on October 28, 1962, a handwritten letter and said:

"Dear Mr. President:

"With proper precautions for warding off the ill-luck which is said to attend upon and punish premature statement, may I congratulate you on your leadership, firmness, and judgment over the past touchy week. We have not had these qualities at the helm in this country at all times. It is good to have them again.

"Only a few people know better than I how hard these decisions are to make, and how broad the gap is between the advisers and the decider. It may be that we are not out of the woods yet. I remember the fate of our high hopes as the Korean armistice was agreed to. But through the dangers of the flypaper of talk are clear, what has already happened amply shows the wisdom of the course you chose -- and stuck to. I am happy that you enabled me to participate in the events of the past week.

"Most respectfully,

Dean Acheson

The President replied in longhand:

The White House
Washington

October 29th

Dear Mr. Acheson,

"My thanks for your generous letter and for your service in the past days.

It is a comforting feeling to have a distinguished captain of other battles in other years available for present duty.

Sincerely,

John Kennedy

Then the President sent me one of those paperweight mementos that he had with his initials and mine in October with the 16th and the 28th brought out in deeper letters. I wrote him on the 30th of November and said:

"How kind and imaginative of you to have designed and to have made a recipient of such a delightful memento of those stirring and critical days in October. I am deeply grateful for it, and grateful, too -- as I wrote you earlier -- for the opportunity you opened to me to take part in the campaign so widely conceived and vigorously executed. In its execution you confounded de Tocqueville's opinion that a democracy 'cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience.'

Most respectfully yours

Dean Acheson